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## **Gravina bridge new media darling**

by KDN

A proposed bridge project that would link Ketchikan with Gravina Island is gaining fame, and some notoriety, in the national and international media. Long-favored by many local residents, the hard link from Ketchikan to Gravina has become a focal point in the national debate over a multi-billion dollar federal transportation bill pending in Congress. Stories that ran last month in the New York Times and The (London) Daily Telegraph pointed to the bridge as a prime example of government largesse and pork barrel spending.

The House version includes \$125 million for the Gravina Access Project, thanks to Alaska Rep. Don Young, chairman of the House Transportation Committee. The bridge isn't in the Senate version.

"Opponents of the bill have made it the poster child of why people should oppose the bill, but they have completely misrepresented it," said Steve Hansen, spokesman for the House Transportation Committee. "Chairman Young is still committed to the Gravina bridge, but there's still a lot of work that needs to be done before this bill becomes final and signed into law."

Leaders from the House and Senate began preliminary discussions with the White House last week. The House version would spend \$275 billion over six years, while the Senate version calls for \$318 billion in spending. President Bush has threatened to veto any bill that spends more than \$256 billion. "The House and Senate leadership are talking now on a final dollar figure," Hansen said. "They haven't gotten into the details."

The House bill also contains \$200 million for the Knik Arm bridge from Anchorage to Point MacKenzie and \$25 million for the Ketchikan Shipyard.

For more information, see Joanna Markell's article in the May 6, 2004, edition of the Ketchikan Daily News.